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(Original Signature of Member)

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. _____

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to expand the Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and to direct the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct a study to assess certain mental health care resources of the Department of Veterans Affairs available to veterans who live in rural areas.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mrs. AXNE introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee
on _____

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to expand the Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and to direct the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct a study to assess certain mental health care resources of the Department of Veterans Affairs available to veterans who live in rural areas.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “Sgt. Ketchum Rural
3 Veterans Mental Health Act of 2021”.

4 **SEC. 2. EXPANSION OF RURAL ACCESS NETWORK FOR**
5 **GROWTH ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM OF THE**
6 **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

7 (a) EXPANSION.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs
8 shall establish and maintain three new centers of the
9 RANGE Program.

10 (b) LOCATIONS.—The centers established under sub-
11 section (a) shall be located in areas determined by the Sec-
12 retary based on—

13 (1) the need for additional mental health care
14 for rural veterans in such areas; and

15 (2) interest expressed by personnel at facilities
16 of the Department in such areas.

17 (c) TIMELINE.—The Secretary shall establish the
18 centers under subsection (a) during fiscal year 2022.

19 (d) FUNDING.—There is authorized to be appro-
20 priated \$1,200,000 for each of fiscal years 2022 through
21 2024 to carry out this section.

22 **SEC. 3. GAO STUDY OF MENTAL HEALTH CARE FURNISHED**
23 **BY THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**
24 **TO RURAL VETERANS.**

25 (a) STUDY REQUIRED.—The Comptroller General of
26 the United States shall conduct a study to assess whether

1 the Department of Veterans Affairs has sufficient re-
2 sources to serve rural veterans who need covered mental
3 health care. Such study shall include assessments of—

4 (1) whether the mental health care furnished by
5 the Secretary (through resources including the
6 RANGE Program, Enhanced RANGE Program,
7 mental health residential rehabilitation treatment
8 programs, inpatient mental health services, and
9 PRR centers) is sufficient to meet the covered men-
10 tal health care needs of rural veterans;

11 (2) how best to expand and to appropriately lo-
12 cate resources described in paragraph (1);

13 (3) whether to require the establishment of a
14 PRR center at a medical facility of the Department
15 that serves 1,000 or more veterans on the National
16 Psychosis Registry;

17 (4) the demand by rural veterans for mental
18 health resources specified in paragraph (1);

19 (5) the average wait time for a rural veteran for
20 mental health resources specified in paragraph (1);
21 and

22 (6) how many rural veterans died by suicide or
23 overdose—

24 (A) while on a wait list for mental health
25 resources specified in paragraph (1); and

1 (B) during the term of the study.

2 (b) REPORT REQUIRED.—Not later than 18 months
3 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Comp-
4 troller General shall submit to the Committees on Vet-
5 erans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives
6 a report containing the results of the study under this sec-
7 tion.

8 **SEC. 4. DEFINITIONS.**

9 In this Act:

10 (1) The term “covered mental health care”
11 means mental health care that is more intensive
12 than traditional outpatient therapy.

13 (2) The term “PRR center” means a psycho-
14 social rehabilitation and recovery center of the De-
15 partment of Veterans Affairs.

16 (3) The term “RANGE Program” means the
17 Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement
18 Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

19 (4) The term “rural veteran” means a veteran
20 who lives in a rural or highly rural area (including
21 such an area in a Tribal or insular area), as deter-
22 mined through the use of the Rural-Urban Com-
23 muting Areas coding system of the Department of
24 Agriculture.